

Joseph Carlebach

BY HAIM H. COHN

For Eva, Esther and Mirjam.

I

The first bearer of the name of Joseph Carlebach known to us lived in the seventeenth century in Heidelberg. Not much is related of him in the family chronicles: the only achievement recorded by an anonymous chronicler is that he gave his children in marriage to the daughter and son of one Herz Marx in Heidelberg. The house of Herz Marx, and the small rural community of Heidelberg, must have been no small attraction: at any rate, it was from that time onwards that Heidelberg became the home of the Carlebachs. Four or five generations of them prospered there as merchants of cattle and of farm products. They afford good examples of Southern-German small-town orthodox Jews whom Yeshayahu Wolfsberg has so aptly described.¹⁾ Stout and sturdy no less than their German farmer neighbours, nor any less deeply rooted in and attached to their soil, they were filled with simplicity and cheerfulness, a childlike naiveté and an innate good humour. Their only language — apart from the liturgical Hebrew — was the purest Swabian idiom ever heard; and even their pronunciation of the Hebrew was distinctly Swabian. While ostensibly and admittedly free from all scholarly ambitions, they were meticulously observant of the whole traditional ritual. They lived their lives as they had seen their parents and grandparents before them live theirs; and they were fruitful, and increased abundantly.

It was in 1857 that another Joseph Carlebach thought to detect in his sixth son a stroke of intellect worth while developing; and he allowed the twelve year old to attend secondary school in nearby Bruchsal, a two hours' daily walk. When he had matriculated nine years later, the father saw the boldest dreams of generations come true: one of his sons would become a rabbi. And when Salomon Carlebach was eventually, in 1870, appointed to the rabbinate in Lübeck, Lübeck became the hometown of the Carlebachs, and the rabbinate their trademark.

II

Because of his strong and colourful personality, his generous heart, and his energetic leadership, Salomon Carlebach became a legend to generations of Lübeck Jews. His outstanding traits were an — even at that time — unusual combination of Jewish and German, religious and patriotic, scholarly and athletic, uncompromisingly severe and naïvely good-humoured. His rab-

¹⁾ Popular Orthodoxy, Year Book I, 1956, p. 237.

binical education, coupled with the leisure and the determination to continue studying throughout his life, and the company of a few talmudical scholars whom he had invited to settle in Lübeck, enabled him to compile several volumes on commentaries and glossaries to the Talmud, and to write a fluent Hebrew in the manner of medieval talmudists. But before he ever took up his rabbinical studies, he had received his doctorate at a German university with a thesis on medieval German literature, and his thorough knowledge of German language and literature rather outshone his familiarity with other subjects. He was a master of the German speech, and as an orator from the orthodox rabbi's pulpit in Germany was surpassed by none but his son, Joseph. In his *Ratgeber für das jüdische Haus*, a publication intended as a vademecum for orthodox Jewish families, he gave lists of books which he held should be available in every truly Jewish home, among them all German classics, poets and dramatists, as well as Ibsen, Björnson, Seneca, Marc Aurel, Shakespeare, Tolstoi, Carlyle, and many others — not to speak of the orthodox literature of the time (Samson Raphael Hirsch); but he also allowed the history books of Graetz into the Jewish house, expressly apologising that there was not as yet any other comprehensive Jewish history available in the German language. His love of the German fatherland, and his loyalty to the German Kaiser, were as deep and sincere as was his firm belief in the superiority of the German civilisation; and his faith in an ultimate messianic salvation and redemption of the Jews was inextricably interwoven with the corresponding faith in the messianic salvation of all nations into one great brotherhood. He dissociated himself most emphatically and vehemently from all Zionist conceptions and aspirations — not only because he believed in the return of the Jewish people to Zion as an incident of their messianic redemption, to be brought about by God in His due time and not to be anticipated by operation of man, but also because, as a *Realpolitiker*, he saw the solution of the Jewish problem in the peaceful co-existence of the Jews with their gentile fellow-citizens and regarded the thesis of the insolubility of the Jewish problem otherwise than in their own national home, as so much utter nonsense. He himself took an active part in the civic affairs of his city; and he let no date and no event of German national importance pass without making it the subject of a sermon.

His was an imposing appearance: he looked like a patriarch of old. It fitted well into the picture of his personality that he not only preached the maxim *mens sana in corpore sano*, but practised himself, until the last days of his life, gymnastics and physical exercises. He had a sincere affection for, and an intimate knowledge of, each and every member of his community; but he was no respecter of persons. You could often see his long white hair uncovered over his white beard, when he lifted his large black hat and bowed deep to greet a passing child.

The influence of his example and of his personality on his sons — five of

whom became rabbis — cannot be overestimated. He ruled them, invisibly and inaudibly, but none the less effectively. And the burden of their heritage weighed heavily on them.

III

The orthodox rabbi who requires of his followers the strict and unquestioning adherence to every iota of Jewish ritual, and who — at the same time and in the same person — is not only a faithful disciple, but also an outstanding spokesman, of a gentile civilisation, is a phenomenon of the past. The practical and ideological affirmation of non-Jewish values has always and everywhere brought about some diminution of orthodoxy; the “conservative” Judaism now current in the United States and elsewhere is a striking example. One of the few exceptions to this rule is the orthodoxy in pre-war Germany, with some rather insignificant remnants thereof still to be found in places of German emigration. It is not difficult, and nothing new, to trace the origin of the combination of *Tora* and *Derech Eretz*, or (to use another paraphrase of Samson Raphael Hirsch) of *Yisroel* and *Mensch*, back to the reform movement of Geiger and his disciples: the answer which the orthodox gave to the challenge of the reformers was that there was nothing incompatible in Judaism with German speech, thought, and culture; and instead of integrating the Jews into the German *Kulturgemeinschaft* and eradicating from their consciousness all such things Jewish as were believed to be impediments in the way of total emancipation and proper assimilation: you had just to furnish living proof that you would be the much better German, the better a Jew you were. It was a perhaps naïve, but none the less sincere, optimism that led men like Hirsch, Hildesheimer, and, later, Joseph Carlebach, to aspire to a perfection of the personality in all aspects of life and thought: in order to be a good German, you had to be a good Jew, and in order to be a good Jew, you had to be a good man; and as you could not be a good Jew without being a learned Jew, so you could not be a cultured man without being well read and well versed in all fields of human civilisation.

There was no escaping conflicts and contradictions; but most of the orthodox rabbis solved the problem by giving the teachings of Jewish tradition on any given subject an overriding right of preference. Not so, or not always necessarily so, Joseph Carlebach: he would face the conflicts and try to solve them on their merits; it was only when either a question of faith or a question of ritual arose, that the non-Jewish had to give way. Two examples may illustrate the process: Carlebach would quote extensively from the New Testament, in direct violation of medieval bans upon the study of Christian scripture; but his purpose would always be to make a point in the statement of his case for the Jewish faith. Or, in many of his lectures and writings you find references to anthropological research, throw-

ing doubt on or disproving traditional Bible exegesis, or rationalizing matters which, according to Jewish tradition, were irrational and God-ordained: he would either go along with the anthropologists, if he could find a formula by which the Jewish faith was kept intact, or reject the anthropological theories — but never without having considered and discussed them on their merits. It was his deep conviction that, under the true interpretation of Jewish religion, no extraneous matter may be held taboo and no gate may be closed to the inquiring mind; and that there was nothing beneath the sun that would not, properly seen and rightly understood, contribute to our knowledge of and faith in God.

All in all, and looking at it in retrospect, it was an extraordinary feat of intellectual acrobatics; and to succeed — as Joseph Carlebach succeeded — you had to have the firmness of faith of an apostle, the knowledge of an encyclopedist, the imagination of an artist, and the determination of a revolutionary. It would require a psychologist and historian of acumen (rather than an unqualified and biased observer as is the present writer) to enquire into the makings of such a man.

IV

It appears that Joseph Carlebach was not destined, and did not intend, to become a rabbi: when, at the age of 18, he left Lübeck for Berlin University, he chose mathematics, physics, and chemistry for his subjects. I have never been able to find out what it was that prompted him to choose the exact and natural sciences as his field of study: both in his school days and in his adult life, his interest in and talent for the humanities were manifest and generally recognised. Family tradition has it that he desired to become a medical man, and that for some reason (which is unknown) his father objected; whereupon he chose the next best to medicine and became a scientist. His desire to take up medicine, however, surely did not spring so much from any preoccupation with medical science, as from emotional motives connected with the ethics of the medical profession — his natural urge to help his fellowmen and alleviate their suffering, was to characterise and mould his whole career. There was an uncle living in Lübeck, a doctor by profession, whom the child Joseph is reported to have adored; maybe it was his example that the adolescent wished to follow. Could it be that the father's objection had, consciously or subconsciously, something to do with the fact that this uncle was already at that time — the turn of the century — an ardent Zionist and a faithful follower of Herzl's?

But the father's wish was unquestionable command. And so it was that Joseph became the pupil of Max von Planck, Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, and Wilhelm Dilthey. He worked for four years in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut; and apart from his proper subjects, he devoted much time to astronomy, the fascination of which remained with him all his life.

The choice of the natural sciences for his subjects had at least three momentous effects on his life. First and foremost, his mind was trained to exact thinking and irrevocably committed to the realities. To witness the tremendous progress of physical science at its very centre and at the time of far-reaching new discoveries, imbued him with an insatiable thirst for knowledge, a never failing interest in the propensities of the natural powers, and at the same time with a kind of intellectual humility, a sense of fundamental ignorance — which in some way or other always brought him back to God.

Secondly, his diploma in the natural sciences made him a teacher. He did not — as far as I am aware — ever devote any systematic study to pedagogics; but he was a born teacher, and — apart from an academic career which he might perhaps have pursued later on — he could do nothing with his diploma but seek a teaching job in a secondary school. As it turned out, he did not have to seek the job either.

For, thirdly, an orthodox young man, with a diploma from Berlin University in mathematics and the natural sciences, was exactly what was badly needed at the Lemel School in Jerusalem which was at that time owned by the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden. Ephraim Cohen, the then principal, happened to be in Berlin when the young Carlebach received his diploma, and engaged him on the spot. Again it appears that the lucky candidate had some qualms on account of what his father would have to say to his son going to Eretz Yisrael; but his qualms were set at rest when a letter came urging him to go. So it was mathematics that brought him, in 1905, to Jerusalem; and, needless to say, the imprint of the years he spent in the Holy Land was to shape his whole outlook and to give his world a new horizon.

V

It was in Jerusalem that Joseph Carlebach first encountered the Jewish religion other than its German variety. If he found any *Derech Eretz*, it was rather in the original meanings of the term; but the "Germans" on the "Deutscher Platz" in the Old City, as well as their neighbours from other *Landsmannschaften*, abhorred and outlawed any secular study; their architecture and their dress were immediate outward signs of the fact that their conceptions of religious life and religious duties had not changed since the Middle Ages. The first thing Carlebach found out was that the leading rabbis of the Ashkenazi communities in Jerusalem had imposed a ban (*Cherem*) on anybody who would teach at the Lemel School — not to speak of the parents who would send their children there; and the young man found himself faced with the dilemma of either disobeying a rule laid down by highest religious authority, which he unquestioningly considered binding upon him, or betraying his own *Weltanschauung* and education and for-

saking the way on which he had started and the purposes in which he believed. But he wanted to be a faithful and observant Jew even according to the most rigid standards, and he wanted nothing less than lend his name and reputation (which, of course, was the name and reputation of his father) to an undermining of the authority of the religious leaders.

His problems (like those of so many others) were solved when he first met Rabbi Kook who at that time was the Chief Rabbi of Jaffa. He had been one of the few rabbis who, when approached to append their signatures to the *Cherem*, had publicly refused to do so. It was Rabbi Kook who urged Carlebach to go on with the job, impressing him with the necessity of raising a new generation of Jews in Palestine who would be able to use all available human knowledge, and the latest scientific techniques, for the upbuilding of the land. I am not sure whether it was the weight of his arguments or the irresistibility of his personality that captured the young man's mind; but there is no doubt that the advice he received struck an immediate echo in him: it was what he had really wanted to hear, and it was the backing he had needed.

Although the *Cherem* applied to him and the Faithful were prohibited from having any intercourse with him, he found open doors everywhere. Men like Rabbi Shmuel Salant (one of the signatories of the *Cherem*) made him welcome not only at his table, but also at his talmudical discourses; and he found it easy — and stimulating — to partake of lectures and discussions in Yiddish on the "Deutscher Platz" and in "Mea Shearim", as well as of lectures and discussions in Hebrew (which then started to become fashionable) in the houses of David Yellin and Yeshayahu Press. And while he himself taught in German — the official language of the Lemel School —, he acquired during those years a good working knowledge of both Yiddish and Hebrew. One of his pupils told me that outside school he would always insist on speaking Hebrew to the boys, not so much for ideological reasons, but in order to get some training in the modern spoken language.

Those pupils saw in their young teacher some sort of a miracle; to the present day, you can see their eyes sparkle when they speak of him. Most — if not all — of them came of orthodox families which had settled outside the city walls and wanted to give their sons a practical — in addition to the religious — education. They were accustomed to teachers who worked the boys from morning till night over their books; and along came this mathematician who would take the boys out, afternoons and evenings, wandering with them over the hills around Jerusalem, and never tiring of walking and talking. The man actually knew the names of every star in the firmament, of every plant and shrub on earth! He could tell you how old the stones were and how their layers developed! He knew the hiding places of the animals and would show you how they fed and lived! He would explain the formation of clouds and direction of winds and actually forecast the weather! Not to speak of the breathtaking manner in which he would

dramatize the events of bygone ages when you came upon a historic site; nor of the actuality and immediate importance which he would give the ancient laws and rituals on purity and uncleanness, on the gleanings of farm-lands, or on "uncircumcised" trees. And you would have to sing loudly most of the way, praising God for the abundance and beauty of this world; and to halt at exactly the right time to say the prescribed prayers in unison. No wonder this kind of Jewishness was a revelation to them, as striking as it was delightful; but I daresay most of their elders heartily disapproved of this slightly deranged *Yecke* to whom the divine injunction to study day and night apparently meant nothing, while he would frown upon any of his pupils who would not observe the fast in memory of the late Gedalja.

For Carlebach himself the Jerusalem years were an eye-opener in still another respect; if he had been brought up in the belief that there was one, and only one, Jewish religion, he now learned that the religions of the various communities differed not only in matters of cult and liturgy, but also in fundamentals. Food prohibited by the one, was allowed by the other; intermarriage was forbidden; and codifications authoritative to the one were heresy to others. They recognised each other as Jews, but in matters of Jewish religion would each claim a monopoly in orthopractice. The more reason and the more justification, he may have thought, for practising his own Jewish way of life and bringing up new young generations to cherish it, good and full of hope and promise as it was to them. And there may then have started to grow in him some missionary idea, that he had a contribution to make to the education of the "uneducated" Jewish youth.

VI

His opportunity came during the First World War. The command of the German *Oberost* Forces charged him with organizing a secondary school system in Lithuania. The Gymnasium which he founded, and for several years headed, became his great laboratory. Thousands of children who had not and never would have known any education other than that of the traditional *Cheder*, flocked into the Gymnasium. This time no *Cherem* obstructed his work; whether it was for fear of the German Occupation Forces under whose patronage the school was established, or because Carlebach immediately used his influence as *Landesbeirat* to have German military protection extended to the *Yeshivot* within their jurisdiction, or by reason of the relative liberal-mindedness of the Lithuanian rabbis — the fact is that he enjoyed their tolerance, if not their active help. Which is remarkable not only in view of the secular subjects taught at the school, but still more so in view of the fact that the language of instruction was not Yiddish, nor German, but Hebrew.

Nor was Hebrew taught solely for its own sake or as a vehicle for Jewish studies. What he had failed to sense in Jerusalem a decade earlier, he now distinctly



SALOMON CARLBACH (1845-1919)



JOSEPH CARLBACH (1883-1942)

sensed in Kovno: there was a national spirit awakening in the Jewish youth, a sense of national self-consciousness, a revolting against the suppression and oppression of centuries. This was a challenge that the enthusiastic educator was only too willing to take up, and he made the best of it. It is not that he let himself be converted to active Zionism; but he elevated the Hebrew land and the Hebrew language into symptoms of the Jewish renaissance, heralds of the bright future which had already begun to dawn, not just witnesses of a glorious past; and he inspired a good many fine builders of the land of Israel.

Much of his attention at that time was devoted also to the conditions prevailing in the existing Jewish educational institutions, the *Yeshiva* and the *Cheder*. I do not know that he succeeded, or tried, to bring about any changes — if not in the curricula, at least in external living conditions or in matters of discipline. But the intimate knowledge he acquired of the working of these age-old institutions of Jewish learning prompted him to take up his weapon — his sharp pen — in their defence, when the communist education authorities staged a bogus trial and sentenced the *Cheder* to death. He had learned in Jerusalem that it was foolish to claim a monopoly for the righteousness of one's own way, and that you should never judge and condemn the other's way only for the reason that it is not your own.

VII

The story of Carlebach as an educator would not be complete without an account of his years as the principal of the *Talmud Tora Realschule* in Hamburg. When he became the headmaster of that school in 1922, he was in his fortieth year: no longer the young experimentalist who had to pave his way and earn himself recognition; but an educator of high repute and standing, with several years of rabbinical office — as his father's successor in Lübeck — behind him. Before he even started, he was clothed with authority, both pedagogical and rabbinical; and no small part of this a-priori standing may have been due to his imposing appearance and his at times rather grandiloquent bearing.

The *Talmud Tora Realschule* had for some 120 years been conducted as an orthodox primary school, in which the subjects taught at all other primary schools were supplemented by courses in Bible, Talmud, and Jewish history. Carlebach soon introduced Hebrew language and grammar as a major subject, followed in due course by Hebrew literature, with special emphasis on the medieval poets and philosophers. He had new laboratories built for instruction in physics and chemistry. Swimming courses and outdoor sports were made compulsory. And he introduced a course in the history of the fine arts which he himself gave to the highest form.

One of his best innovations were the excursions. One-day-outings into the neighbourhood had been known and practised before; but he organised

one-week or two-week journeys into distant parts of the country, whether for the purpose of physical exercise, or for geological or botanical studies, or for the visiting of museums and historic sites — or for all those objects combined. The most memorable of such excursions were those in which he himself took part: I remember a *Rheinfahrt* which took us in two weeks from Cologne to Mainz, with no town and no village, no castle and no site, no hill and no forest left out from inspection and enjoyment. Every day would start and end with a swim in the Rhine, with the bearded, hairy rabbi in the forefront and dozens of boys splashing at and after him — to the delight of an ever growing number of native spectators who had never seen (and would never again see) anything like it. He spent a full day with the boys in the Cathedral at Cologne, expertly explaining every detail of the statues, the glass windows, the ornaments, and the intricacies of the Catholic faith and ritual; but I was not allowed to participate, being a Cohen who may not be under the same roof with a corpse or with tombs, lest he become impure; and although, according to the letter of the Law, it is only the Jewish dead the contact with whom renders impure, and not the non-Jewish dead, still Carlebach held that the least possibility that among the dead buried in the cathedral may have been a person of Jewish origin (even though ultimately converted to Christianity), sufficed to make the place taboo to me.

I relate this episode because I think it is significant for the portrait of the man: on the one hand the freedom from preconceived notions of the inaccessibility of non-Jewish places of worship and non-Jewish ritual art; and on the other hand the strict and unbending adherence to the letter of Jewish law, however meaningless it may appear to have become. When questioned about the manifest discrimination between injunctions he honoured and injunctions he disregarded, he would readily reply that the prohibitions relating to non-Jewish places and articles of worship applied only to heathen and not to theistic religions, and that any later extensions of the rule were prompted by the then justified fear of conversion to Christianity, with all the personal freedom and earthly riches attaching thereto — a fear that with the strength of our own faith and the security of our own personal freedom no longer existed.

One of the secrets of his success as an educator was that there were never any doubts apparent in him: whatever the question, whatever the subject — his was the exact knowledge, the latest information, the right approach, and the perfect solution. He had an air of authority which he used to best advantage, and his powers of persuasion were such that no adversary easily ventured into the arena — certainly not from among the boys in school. When he left the classroom, he always had the boys gasping — whether from the sheer force of his performance, or the impact of his dramatisation, or an outbreak of furious indignation, or the overflow of hilarious merriment. To us boys he was not unlike the giant Atlas who carried the pillars of heaven on his shoulders.

VIII

Rabbi Kook, and later Professor David Hoffmann of Berlin, had given Carlebach his diploma and authorisation as rabbi. He had never had any systematic, full-time rabbinical education, but he had a sound knowledge of all Jewish disciplines. He was much too well versed in far too many other subjects, to be able to attain the standard of the great talmudical scholars in Palestine and Eastern Europe; still he firmly held his ground among the orthodox rabbis of Germany. If his choice for the successorship to his father's rabbinate in Lübeck may have been prompted by considerations other than his rabbinical learning, there is no doubt that the Chief Rabbinate of Altona, which for centuries had always been occupied by the most illustrious scholars, would not have been offered to him, were it not for his scholarly qualifications. When finally, in 1935, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, his fame was widespread and his reputation well established as one of the leading figures in orthodox world Jewry.

Well aware of his own shortcomings, he surrounded himself — just as his father had done — with eminent scholars from Eastern Europe whom he induced to settle in his city. He established *Yeshivot* and synagogues for them and accorded them royal honours. He would insist on their continuing in their old way of life, speaking and teaching in Yiddish, and not even adopting the local liturgical rites. And so his communities became centres of talmudical learning and attracted scholars and students not only from other parts of Germany, but from other countries as well.

As a rabbi, Carlebach was, first and foremost, the perfect *Seelsorger*. He had an inexhaustible patience with any suffering human being — however impatient he could be when his time was needlessly wasted. Every beggar who required his help, was as sure of his welcome and attention as any prominent member of his community. He had an open hand and an open heart; where he could not give material help, he helped with kindness and understanding. His house, anyway full of children, was ever full with all kinds of invited and uninvited guests who made themselves at home; and he made everybody feel important and honoured.

The best medicine he freely and generously dispensed, was mirth. There was never a situation in which what was needed was a good laugh where he would not be ready with a suitable joke. He was a great story-teller, and the best of his stories were those he invented on the spot. And when he thought a sad-looking lady or a damsel in distress required some special treatment, he would solemnly address her in verses and rhymes, improvised for the occasion, or dance with her to a tune which he would intone.

The way in which he acted during the last years, from 1938 until the end, has become legendary. Under external oppression, the community became one large family, and he the *pater familias*. He was their courageous spokesman and their indefatigable minister: he went into offices and prisons and

camps and hospitals, never tiring of being insulted and thrown out, and never forsaking one iota of his dignity. His proud bearing is reported to have gained the respect of Nazi officials; be that as it may — nothing saved him and his community from their ultimate fate. In the four months that passed from his deportation to a Riga concentration camp until he was shot, his invincible confidence and firm faith provided a last ray of hope to hundreds and thousands of doomed followers.

IX

I do not know of any dictum of our sage ancestors which has so often and so flagrantly been disproved as the one — reported to have been made by R. Elazar speaking for R. Hanina — that rabbis increase peace in the world. As a matter of common observation and experience, rabbis do not differ from other scholars in their characteristic trait of jealousy and animosity towards their competitors. And where personal ill-feelings are cemented by differences of opinion on matters of substance, you encounter, more often than not, a derision unworthy both of the derider and of the derided.

The natural scapegoat for the hostility of an orthodox rabbi would be the reform rabbi; and there were no doubt many who fought reform Judaism with all the fury and the fervour they could muster — not only against the movement, but also against its sponsors and spokesmen. The same applies to the fight against Zionism and Zionists. The *Protestrabbiner* of Herzl's you could find in every camp; what differed was not so much the mode and manner of the protest as its object.

It is because Joseph Carlebach was in many respects an exception to this general rule, that the incident I am about to relate has an almost tragic aspect. With all his opposition to and negation of the practice and ideology of reform Judaism, he entertained cordial relations with a good many reform rabbis; one of them told me the other day that Carlebach was the only orthodox rabbi he ever knew who would come into his house and partake of a meal, albeit consisting of black coffee or tea and boiled eggs only, and who would always be ready to discuss the points in dispute between them on their merits and in a friendly way. Needless to add, then, that he had many good friends among the religious — though not quite "orthodox" — Zionists; and for men like Nehemia Nobel and Franz Rosenzweig he had a sincere affection and a deep attachment.

But he did not escape contamination with that unfortunate rabbinical disease. The object of his animosity was the Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, Samuel Spitzer, his own predecessor — not a reformer, nor a Zionist, but, if anything, still more orthodox than himself. Spitzer came from Hungary; he was a man of great talmudical erudition, and utterly unbending and inflexible in his rigid orthodoxy. He was a most kindhearted man, of the highest integrity; he had nothing of the polish and the suavity in which

Carlebach excelled; and I have no doubt that Spitzer's inability to make any concession for the sake of diplomacy, contributed in no small degree to the bitterness of the feud which grew between the two men.

There is no reliable information as to how and when and why it all started. The most plausible theory I have heard propounded is that Carlebach was deeply and irremediably offended when Spitzer, having accepted his invitation to come to his house as his guest, would not touch the food offered to him, but insisted on eating only the food prepared for him by his own wife. The offence was not alleviated by the fact that Spitzer never did touch any food anywhere; it was just that he would make no exception even in Carlebach's house that caused the insult. This happened shortly after Carlebach's arrival in Hamburg as principal of the Talmud Tora Realschule, and may have been the beginning of the mutual hostility which was to last until Spitzer's death.

Even as he lived wholly, and loved wholly, and believed wholly, and did everything wholly — so he hated wholly. Irrational as it was, his hatred knew no compromise; and in relation to the subject of his hatred, he lost all perspicuity and all perspective. There must have been some subconscious power which drove him into such a blind fury: maybe it had something to do with a hidden guilt complex for not being solely and only Jewish and for letting "outer wisdoms" invade and enrich him; or maybe it was the suppression — whether for the sake of orthodoxy, or by continuous operation of innate filial piety — of his inclination to Zionist ideologies and aspirations, which revenged itself upon him. The fact is that he was relieved of his calamity only when he ascended Spitzer's pulpit as Chief Rabbi of Hamburg — at a time when the grim realities of the Nazi régime had made Zionism the only plausible synonym for Jewish hopes and Jewish life.

X

I believe he knew he was, deep in his heart, a Zionist, ever since he first met Rabbi Kook. When the Agudat Yisrael was founded in 1912, he (and Rabbi Kook) entertained great hopes that this world organisation of orthodoxy would embrace both non-Zionists and Zionists; but though his hopes proved futile, he remained throughout an active member, while not a contentious partisan, of the Aguda. Still it happened time and again that he revealed his secret: the most memorable occasion was when Weizmann came to Hamburg in the early twenties and was, of course, boycotted by the entire Agudist orthodoxy; but Carlebach ostentatiously greeted him in public and addressed him in the words of the Bible: "Thou art a prince of God among us" — which brought on Carlebach venomous attacks from many orthodox quarters.

It was in 1935 that he visited Palestine again. The first Jewish boat, "Tel Aviv", had been purchased in Hamburg, and the Chief Rabbi was invited to sail on her maiden voyage to Tel Aviv. When the anchors were lifted in

the port of Hamburg, the *Hatiqva* burst forth from the mouths of hundreds of people who stayed behind, and then the strong clear voice of the Rabbi rang out, *Lehitraot be-Eretz Yisrael!* But when in Jerusalem a few weeks later he saw his old mentor again, Rabbi Kook gave him, as always, the advice he really wanted to hear: that it was his duty as rabbi to return to his flock and to stand by his community in times of distress and suffering. Which he unhesitatingly and unfailingly did.

XI

I mentioned his strong clear voice — and I ought to say something of his rhetorics. His preoccupation with art and the history of art was some kind of theorisation of his many artistic talents; he activated all these artistic talents in speech-making. He was not only the most perfect and fluent user of words, with an inexhaustible vocabulary at his command, but he was also a great actor — he knew how to use his arms and hands and the movements of his body and the expressions of his face, to convey the meaning of his words and give them the greatest possible impact. Not that he would ever misuse his talents for cheap or demagogic oratory: he was much too refined for that, much too learned and civilised, much too conscious of his own capabilities, and much too ambitious. He would work on a speech very painstakingly, writing down, more often than not, the whole of it; but he would deliver it freely, without even glancing at a note. The way he would go up to the rostrum or to the pulpit, waiting first until all noise had subsided and making sure that everybody watched, raised a pleasant expectation, not unlike the lifting of a curtain on a beautiful stage decoration; and he had only to open his mouth, perhaps slightly spreading and lifting his hands, in order to sense an instant contact with his audience. And there would never be a dull moment for any of his listeners: everything would be alive and exciting, permeated with drama, and of immediate concern. It must have been his classroom experience, with the rows of open-eyed and open-mouthed boys raptly staring at him, that gave him the clues to his technique as public speaker; and it was the same power by which he held a handful of boys in a class, and the largest audiences, spellbound.

Small wonder that the public weekly lectures he gave in Hamburg while holding office as principal of the school, drew very large crowds. Never before and, I daresay, never after have lectures in German on the Bible by an orthodox teacher been such a public attraction; nor do I think that any orthodox Bible lecturer, in Hebrew in Israel or in English in the United States or in any language anywhere, has ever been able to achieve anything like the success Carlebach had. It is, of course, not only that speakers of his eloquence are rare indeed; but that the orthodox have not produced spiritual leaders of acumen who combined Jewish and general scholarship with the gift of presentation and rhetoric. Carlebach was that

rare and now, I am afraid, extinct combination of *maggid* and professor, who did not discard either the persuading power of the advocate, or the entertaining skill of the actor, or the flowery language of the poet, in order to conquer the hearts and minds of the people.

XII

He was a prolific writer. A good many of his speeches and lectures he published later, either in the form of articles or in the form of books; among the latter, his books on the Three Great Prophets, The Song of Songs, and Kohelet, deserve special mention. But apart from reducing his speeches to writing, he loved writing for its own sake; and his pen was as easy as his tongue. There are one hundred published articles listed in his biography;²⁾ with one or two (Hebrew) exceptions, they are all in the German language. Some of his disciples in Israel are now preparing a selection from them for translation into Hebrew and publication in Israel.

He wrote an easy German, keeping his sentences relatively short, and mostly abstaining from the use of foreign and technical words. But when reading what he wrote, you have an immediate acoustic reaction: it is as if you heard somebody speaking the words you read. He was an orator even in writing; and while writing came as naturally to him as did speech, in essence he always spoke and never just wrote. Thus, you find his writings interspersed with many rhetorical questions; in order to bring a point home to you, he would use a number of synonymous words all at once; and here and there you would detect other mannerisms of speech.

His range of subjects extended far and wide. He wrote (enthusiastically) on Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung* and (devastatingly) on Auerbach's *Wüste und Gelobtes Land*. He argued with the same fervour against Geiger's Reform Judaism and against the *Epigonen der Bibelkritik*. He wrote on Bialik, David Yellin, and Pines — as well as on Shmuel Salant and the Chofez Chajim; and so he wrote on Albert Ballin and on Claude Montefiore. *Die Pflanzenwelt und das Judentum* was of as much actuality to him as the *Geschichte der Juden in Burg auf Fehmarn*. He made several major contributions to Jewish law; his *Wesen und Wertung des Minhag in Israel* and his *Rabbinische Schiedsgerichte*, are monographs of lasting value. The most distinctive contribution he made in the field of the religious aspect of natural science: his *Naturwissenschaft und Wunder* is the elaboration of a series of lectures, and the written words still retain some of the fascination the speeches had. In his particular field of mathematics, he published, and commented on, the writings of the medieval philosopher, poet and mathematician, R. Levi ben Gerson, who provided him with the subject for his doctoral thesis and engaged his attention throughout his life.

²⁾ Joseph Carlebach and his Generation, by Rabbi Naphtali Carlebach, New York 1959.

And his writings on actual problems of the day, on Jewish education, ethics, and the philosophy of life, are too numerous to mention.

XIII

In his essay, *Moral und Politik*, published in 1931, Carlebach wrote: "We read in Talmud *Erachin 17a* a discussion on the verse, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek Thy face, O Jacob' — between R. Yehuda, the prince, and the other scholars. One said, the generation is like its leader; the others said, the leader is like the generation. And the Talmud continues: 'What is this discussion about? Is it that the one thinks that where a generation improves, its leader improves with it, and the others think that where the leader improves, the generation improves with him? But there is Zidkiya, who excelled himself, and his generation was poor; or there is Yoyakim, who was depraved, but his generation was great? No — the discussion is as to whether to judge sternly or to judge mildly.' At any rate, what is clear from this discussion between R. Yehuda and the scholars is that the leader and his generation are equally important partners. They are interdependent, and their success depends upon their cooperation... The leader has to start where the people have arrived. He cannot jump into a vacuum... No gardener can take out of a garden more than is warranted by the quality of the soil and the fertility and the sunniness of the garden. And where the gardener fails, the garden is not yet doomed to barrenness — it will bring forth grass and yield seed of its own. But at the end there is always the personality of the leader who takes the initiative. However true it is that leader and generation are images of each other — in general it will be true to say that the garden depends more on the gardener than the gardener on the garden... Only a true leader is capable of giving a direction to the drives of the people, of unifying and determining their purpose, and of imbuing them with the courage to proceed on their way. Rav Chisda said, on the day the leader and the community are judged, the leader is judged first, not only because of his honour, but so that he be judged before the judge's wrath has become too great (*Rosh Hashana 16a*). The leader is entitled to the milder judgment: the responsibility and the burden which he bore were so heavy..."

Let us not judge the generation, nor the leader. We will just record the greatness of one — in memoriam.